

Kitchen Gardening in America: a History

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1995 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Kitchen Gardening in America: a History." *The Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 267-268.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9935>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

The book's second part deals with "Historical Studies." Working from the manuscript census of 1860, with a focus on the Middle West, Jeremy Attack and Fred Bateman ask, "Was There Ever an 'Agrarian Democracy' in America?" They found that there was much inequality in landholding and wealth in the midwestern states in 1860, but federal land policy helped to provide a decent standard of living for most farmers. The most common farm in Iowa at that time was 80 acres, but, according to Attack and Bateman, overall land distribution in Iowa was less equal than in most other midwestern states. Pete Daniel's discussion of "A Hundred Years of Dispossession: Southern Farmers and the Forces of Change" is sharply critical of mechanization and government policy, which, Daniel argues, drove many southern farmers from the land. He claims, as he has done in other writings, that modernization of agriculture in the South ruined farmers and rural communities. In the last main chapter, Harold D. Woodman discusses farming as a business and shows how most modern agriculture is still a family enterprise.

These essays and the accompanying comments make a genuine contribution to the field of agricultural history. The authors are among the field's heavy hitters whose works here and elsewhere have made strong contributions to agricultural and rural history. The volume appropriately honors Wayne Rasmussen. It is unfortunate, however, that the editors did not include a much fuller biography of Rasmussen. Louis Ferleger's brief introduction to Rasmussen's writings is inadequate. The field of agricultural history is stronger and much more vital because of Rasmussen and his work, and those who have written essays in his honor have advanced the field even further.

Kitchen Gardening in America: A History, by David M. Tucker. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. ix, 205 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CLIFFORD E. CLARK JR., CARLETON COLLEGE

The history of vegetable gardening, as presented by David M. Tucker, is more than a survey of plants, tools, and tillage techniques. Through his insightful eyes, the history of kitchen gardening becomes a window into shifting American attitudes toward nature, science, medicine, folk rituals, and social reforms. It is, in effect, an overview of changes in American assumptions about horticulture and the natural environment, starting with practices of Native Americans and running up to the contemporary debate over the use and misuse of chemicals and pesticides.

Tucker begins with the Indian cultivation of corn, squash, and other crops. He then explains how the earliest colonists brought with them a tradition of gardening in raised garden beds and how they mixed folklore and astrology to establish planting times and fertilizing procedures. Successive chapters cover typical New England gardens, Thomas Jefferson's pursuit of agricultural science, the relationship between gardening enthusiasts and nineteenth-century reform movements, the rise of seed companies and the use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides later in the century, the growth of gardening in the suburbs, Victory gardening during both world wars, and finally the emergence of the organic gardening movement in the late twentieth century.

To cover such a broad swath of American history in twelve short chapters, Tucker relies heavily on prescriptive literature—how-to-garden books written by reformers, such as Philip Miller's *The Gardeners Dictionary* (1754), Bernard McMahon's *The American Gardener's Calendar* (1806), and Jerome Rodale's *Pay Dirt* (1945). Tucker also has a fondness for quoting famous American writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Dudley Warner about their gardening ideals. These literary sources and prescriptive literature may or may not have reflected common gardening practices at the time.

Despite his fondness for literary sources and his occasional tendency to idealize horticulture (he even argues that a driving force for suburbanization in America has been the desire to have a garden), Tucker has provided a useful, well-written account of vegetable gardening in America. Readers will particularly enjoy his coverage of the rise of chemical farming and the opposition to it mounted by the organic gardening movement in the twentieth century. In short, Tucker has written a sprightly introduction to the important but neglected history of vegetable gardening that will establish the starting point for all future studies in this field.

Home on the Range: A Culinary History of the American West, by Cathy Luchetti. New York: Villard Books, 1993. xxxiii, 238 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$25.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY SARAH F. MCMAHON, BOWDOIN COLLEGE

The front cover of *Home on the Range: A Culinary History of the American West* offers a second subtitle: "Frontier Recipes and Memories from the Pioneers of the Early West (1800–1915)." Throughout the text, numerous photographs superbly illustrate an intriguing variety of western cooks and cooking situations, and selections from pioneer accounts describe an impressive array of frontier culinary experiences.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.